1
Social Science and Humanism

Humanism is today understood in contradistinction to science, on the one hand, and to the civic art, on the other. It is thus suggested to us that the social sciences are shaped by science, the civic art, and humanism, or that the social sciences dwell in the region where science, the civic art, and humanism meet and perhaps toward which they converge. Let us consider how this meeting might be understood.

Of the three elements mentioned, only science and humanism can be said to be at home in academic life. Science and humanism are not always on friendly terms. We all know the scientist who despises or ignores humanism, and the humanist who despises or ignores science. To understand this conflict, tension, or distinction between science and humanism, we do well to turn for a moment to the seventeenth century, to the age in which modern science constituted itself. At that time Pascal contrasted the spirit of geometry (i.e., the scientific spirit) with the spirit of *finesse*. We may circumscribe the meaning of the French term by referring to terms such as these: subtlety, refinement, tact, delicacy, perceptivity. The scientific spirit is characterized by detachment and by the forcefulness which stems from simplicity or simplification. The spirit of finesse is characterized by attachment or love and by breadth. The principles to which the scientific spirit defers are alien to common sense. The principles with which the spirit of finesse has to do are within common sense, yet they are barely visible; they are felt rather than seen. They are not available in such a way that we could make them the premises of our reasoning. The spirit of finesse is active, not in reasoning, but rather in grasping in one view unanalyzed wholes in their distinctive characters. What is meant today by the contrast between science and humanism represents a more or less profound modification of Pascal's contrast between

the spirit of geometry and the spirit of finesse. In both cases the contrast implies that, in regard to the understanding of human things, the spirit of science has severe limitations—limitations which are overcome by a decidedly nonscientific approach.

What are these limitations as we observe them today within the social sciences? Social science consists of a number of disciplines which are specialized and which are becoming ever more specialized. There is certainly no social science in existence which could claim that it studies society as a whole, social man as a whole, or such wholes as we have in mind when we speak, for example, of this country, the United States of America. De Tocqueville and Lord Bryce are not representative of present-day social science. From time to time one or the other special and specialized science (e.g., psychology or sociology) raises the claim to be comprehensive or fundamental; but these claims always meet strong and justified resistance. Cooperation of the various disciplines may enlarge the horizon of the cooperating individuals; it cannot unify the disciplines themselves; it cannot bring about a true hierarchic order.

Specialization may be said to originate ultimately in this premise: In order to understand a whole, one must analyze or resolve it into its elements, one must study the elements by themselves, and then one must reconstruct the whole or recompose it by starting from the elements. Reconstruction requires that the whole be sufficiently grasped in advance, prior to the analysis. If the primary grasp lacks definiteness and breadth, both the analysis and the synthesis will be guided by a distorted view of the whole, by a figment of a poor imagination rather than by the thing in its fullness. And the elements at which the analysis arrives will at best be only some of the elements. The sovereign rule of specialization means that the reconstruction cannot even be attempted. The reason for the impossibility of reconstruction can be stated as follows: the whole as primarily known is an object of common sense; but it is of the essence of the scientific spirit, at least as this spirit shows itself within the social sciences, to be distrustful of common sense or even to discard it altogether. The commonsense understanding expresses itself in common language; the scientific social scientist creates or fabricates a special scientific terminology. Thus scientific social science acquires a specific abstractness. There is nothing wrong with abstraction, but there is very much wrong with abstracting from essentials. Social science, to the extent to which it is emphatically scientific, abstracts from essential elements of so-

cial reality. I quote from a private communication by a philosophically sophisticated sociologist who is very favorably disposed toward the scientific approach in the social sciences: "What the sociologist calls 'system,' 'role,' 'status,' 'role expectation,' 'situation,' and 'institutionalization' is experienced by the individual actor on the social scene in entirely different terms." This is not merely to say that the citizen and the social scientist mean the same things but express them in different terms. For "the social scientist qua theoretician has to follow a system of relevances entirely different from that of the actor on the social scene. . . . His problems originate in his theoretical interest, and many elements of the social world that are scientifically relevant are irrelevant from the point of view of the actor on the social scene, and vice versa." The scientific social scientist is concerned with regularities of behavior; the citizen is concerned with good government. The relevances for the citizen are values, values believed in and cherished, nay, values which are experienced as real qualities of real things: of man, of actions and thought, of institutions, of measures. But the scientific social scientist draws a sharp line between values and facts: he regards himself as unable to pass any value judgments.

To counteract the dangers inherent in specialization, as far as these dangers can be counteracted within the social sciences, a conscious return to commonsense thinking is needed—a return to the perspective of the citizen. We must identify the whole, in reference to which we should select themes of research and integrate results of research, with the overall objectives of whole societies. By doing this, we will understand social reality as it is understood in social life by thoughtful and broadminded men. In other words, the true matrix of social science is the civic art and not a general notion of science or scientific method. Social science must either be a mere handmaid of the civic art—in this case no great harm is done if it forgets the wood for the trees—or, if it does not want to become or to remain oblivious of the noble tradition from which it sprang, if it believes that it might be able to enlighten the civic art, it must indeed look farther afield than the civic art, but it must look in the same direction as the civic art. Its relevances must become identical, at least at the outset, with those of the citizen or statesman; and therefore it must speak, or learn to speak, the language of the citizen and of the statesman.

From this point of view, the guiding theme of social science in this age and in this country will be democracy, or, more precisely,

liberal democracy, especially in its American form. Liberal democracy will be studied with constant regard to the coactual or copotential alternatives and therefore especially to communism. The issue posed by communism will be faced by a conscientious, serious, and relentless critique of communism. At the same time, the dangers inherent in liberal democracy will be set forth squarely; for the friend of liberal democracy is not its flatterer. The sensitivity to these dangers will be sharpened and, if need be, awakened. From the scientistic point of view, the politically neutral—that which is common to all societies—must be looked upon as the clue to the politically relevant—that which is distinctive of the various regimes. But from the opposite point of view which I am trying to adumbrate, the emphasis is put on the politically relevant: the burning issues.

Social science cannot then rest satisfied with the overall objectives of whole societies as they are for the most part understood in social life. Social science must clarify those objectives, ferret out their self-contradictions and halfheartednesses, and strive for knowledge of the true overall objectives of whole societies. That is to say, the only alternative to an ever more specialized, an ever more aimless, social science is a social science ruled by the legitimate queen of the social sciences—the pursuit traditionally known by the name of ethics. Even today it is difficult, in dealing with social matters, consistently to avoid terms like "a man of character," "honesty," "loyalty," "citizenship education," etc.

This, or something like this, is, I believe, what many people have in mind when speaking of a humanistic approach, as distinguished from the scientistic approach, to social phenomena. We must still account for the term "humanism." The social scientist is a student of human societies, of societies of humans. If he wishes to be loyal to his task, he must never forget that he is dealing with human things, with human beings. He must reflect on the human as human. And he must pay due attention to the fact that he himself is a human being and that social science is always a kind of self-knowledge. Social science, being the pursuit of human knowledge of human things, includes as its foundation the human knowledge of what constitutes humanity, or, rather, of what makes man complete or whole, so that he is truly human. Aristotle calls his equivalent of what now would be called social science the liberal inquiry regarding the human things, and his *Ethics* is the first, the fundamental, and the directive part of that inquiry.

But, if we understand by social science the knowledge of hu-

man things, are we not driven to the conclusion that the time-honored distinction between social science and the humanities must be abandoned? Perhaps we must follow Aristotle a step further and make a distinction between the life of society and the life of the mind, and hence assign the study of the former to social science and the study of the latter, or a certain kind of study of the latter, to the humanities.

There is, finally, another implication of the term "humanism"—viz., the contradistinction of human studies to divinity. Provisionally I limit myself to the remark that humanism may be said to imply that the moral principles are more knowable to man, or less controversial among earnest men, than theological principles.

By reflecting on what it means to be a human being, one sharpens one's awareness of what is common to all human beings, if in different degrees, and of the goals toward which all human beings are directed by the fact that they are human beings. One transcends the horizon of the mere citizen—of every kind of sectionalism—and becomes a citizen of the world. Humanism as awareness of man's distinctive character as well as of man's distinctive completion, purpose, or duty issues in humaneness: in the earnest concern for both human kindness and the betterment and opening of one's mind—a blend of firm delicacy and hard-won serenity—a last and not merely last freedom from the degradation or hardening effected especially by conceit or pretense. One is tempted to say that to be inhuman is the same as to be unteachable, to be unable or unwilling to listen to other human beings.

Yet, even if all were said that could be said and that cannot be said, humanism is not enough. Man, while being at least potentially a whole, is only a part of a larger whole. While forming a kind of world and even being a kind of world, man is only a little world, a microcosm. The macrocosm, the whole to which man belongs, is not human. That whole, or its origin, is either subhuman or superhuman. Man cannot be understood in his own light but only in the light of either the subhuman or the superhuman. Either man is an accidental product of a blind evolution or else the process leading to man, culminating in man, is directed toward man. Mere humanism avoids this ultimate issue. The human meaning of what we have come to call Science consists precisely in this—that the human or the higher is understood in the light of the subhuman or the lower. Mere humanism is powerless to withstand the onslaught of modern science. It is from this point that we can begin to understand again the original meaning of science, of

which the contemporary meaning is only a modification: science as man's attempt to understand the whole to which he belongs. Social science, as the study of things human, cannot be based on modern science, although it may judiciously use, in a strictly subordinate fashion, both methods and results of modern science. Social science must rather be taken to contribute to the true universal science into which modern science will have to be integrated eventually.

To summarize: to treat social science in a humanistic spirit means to return from the abstractions or constructs of scientistic social science to social reality, to look at social phenomena primarily in the perspective of the citizen and the statesman, and then in the perspective of the citizen of the world, in the twofold meaning of "world": the whole human race and the all-embracing whole.

Humanism, as I have tried to present it, is in itself a moderate approach. But, looking around me, I find that it is here and now an extreme version of humanism. Some of you might think that it would be more proper to present the median or average opinion of present-day humanistic social scientists rather than an eccentric one. I feel this obligation, but I cannot comply with it because of the elusive character of that median opinion. I shall therefore describe the extreme opposite of the view which appeals to me, or, rather, one particular expression, which is as good as any other, of that opposite extreme. Median social science humanism can be defined sufficiently for our purpose by the remark that it is located somewhere between these two extremes.

The kind of humanism to which I now turn designates itself as relativistic. It may be called a humanism for two reasons. First, it holds that the social sciences cannot be modeled on the natural sciences, because the social sciences deal with man. Second, it is animated, as it were, by nothing except openness to everything that is human. According to this view, the methods of science, of natural science, are adequate to the study of phenomena to which we have access only by observing them from without and in detachment. But the social sciences deal with phenomena whose core is indeed inaccessible to detached observation but discloses itself, at least to some extent, to the scholar who relives or reenacts the life of the human beings whom he studies or who enters into the perspective of the actors and understands the life of the actors from their own point of view as distinguished from both his point of view and the point of view of the outside observer. Every perspective of active man is constituted by evaluation or is at any

rate inseparable from it. Therefore, understanding from within means sharing in the acceptance of the values which are accepted by the societies or the individuals whom one studies, or accepting these values "histrionically" as the true values, or recognizing the position taken by the human beings under consideration as true. If one practices such understanding often and intensively enough, one realizes that perspectives or points of view cannot be criticized. All positions of this kind are equally true or untrue: true from within, untrue from without. Yet, while they cannot be criticized, they can be understood. However, I have as much right to my perspective as anyone else has to his or any society to its. And, every perspective being inseparable from evaluation, I, as an acting man and not as a mere social scientist, am compelled to criticize other perspectives and the values on which they are based or which they posit. We do not end then in moral nihilism, for our belief in our values gives us strength and direction. Nor do we end in a state of perpetual war of everybody against everybody, for we are permitted to "trust to reason and the council table for a peaceful coexistence."

Let us briefly examine this position, which at first glance recommends itself because of its apparent generosity and unbounded sympathy for every human position. Against a perhaps outdated version of relativism one might have argued as follows. Let us popularly define nihilism as the inability to take a stand for civilization against cannibalism. The relativist asserts that objectively civilization is not superior to cannibalism, for the case in favor of civilization can be matched by an equally strong or an equally weak case in favor of cannibalism. The fact that we are opposed to cannibalism is due entirely to our historical situation. But historical situations change necessarily into other historical situations. A historical situation productive of the belief in civilization may give way to a historical situation productive of belief in cannibalism. Since the relativist holds that civilization is not intrinsically superior to cannibalism, he will placidly accept the change of civilized society into cannibal society. Yet the relativism which I am now discussing denies that our values are simply determined by our historical situation: we can transcend our historical situation and enter into entirely different perspectives. In other words, there is no reason why, say, an Englishman should not become, in the decisive respect, a Japanese. Therefore, our believing in certain values cannot be traced beyond our decision or commitment. One might even say that, to the extent to which we are still able to

reflect on the relation of our values to our situation, we are still trying to shirk the responsibility for our choice. Now, if we commit ourselves to the values of civilization, our very commitment enables and compels us to take a vigorous stand against cannibalism and prevents us from placidly accepting a change of our society in the direction of cannibalism.

To stand up for one's commitment means among other things to defend it against its opponents, not only by deed but by speech as well. Speech is required especially for fortifying those who waver in their commitments to the values we cherish. The waverers are not yet decided to which cause they should commit themselves, or they do not know whether they should commit themselves to civilization or to cannibalism. In speaking to them, we cannot assume the validity of the values of civilization. And, according to the premise, there is no way to convince them of the truth of those values. Hence the speech employed for buttressing the cause of civilization will be not rational discourse but mere "propaganda," a propaganda confronted by the equally legitimate and perhaps more effective propaganda in favor of cannibalism.

This notion of the human situation is said to be arrived at through the practice of sympathetic understanding. Only sympathetic understanding is said to make possible valid criticism of other points of view—a criticism which is based on nothing but our commitment and which therefore does not deny the right of our opponents to their commitments. Only sympathetic understanding, in other words, makes us truly understand the character of values and the manner in which they are legitimately adopted. But what is sympathetic understanding? Is it dependent on our own commitment, or is it independent of it? If it is independent, I am commited as an acting man, and I am uncommited in another compartment of myself, in my capacity as a social scientist. In that latter capacity I am, so to speak, completely empty and therefore completely open to the perception and appreciation of all commitments or value systems. I go through the process of sympathetic understanding in order to reach clarity about my commitment, and this process in no way endangers my commitment, for only a part of my self is engaged in my sympathetic understanding. This means, however, that such sympathetic understanding is not serious or genuine and is, indeed, as it calls itself, "histrionic." For genuinely to understand the value system, say, of a given society, means being deeply moved and indeed gripped by the values to which the society in question is committed and to expose one's self

in earnest, with a view to one's own whole life, to the claim of those values to be the true values. Genuine understanding of other commitments is then not necessarily conducive to the reassertion of one's own initial commitment. Apart from this, it follows from the inevitable distinction between serious understanding and histrionic understanding that only my own commitment, my own "depth," can possibly disclose to me the commitment, the depth, of other human beings. Hence my perceptivity is necessarily limited by my commitment. Universal sympathetic understanding is impossible. To speak crudely, one cannot have the cake and eat it; one cannot enjoy both the advantages of universal understanding and those of existentialism.

But perhaps it is wrong to assume that all positions ultimately rest on commitments, or at any rate on commitments to specific points of view. We all remember the time when most men believed explicitly or implicitly that there is one and only one true value system of universal validity, and there are still societies and individuals who cling to this view. They too must be understood sympathetically. Would it not be harsh and even inconsistent to deprive the Bible and Plato of a privilege which is generously accorded to every savage tribe? And will sympathetic understanding of Plato not lead us to admit that absolutism is as true as relativism, or that Plato was as justified in simply condemning other value positions as the relativist is in never simply condemning any value position? To this our relativist will reply that, while Plato's value system is as defensible as any other, provided it is taken to have no other support than Plato's commitment, Plato's absolutist interpretation of his value system, as well as any other absolutism, has been refuted unqualifiedly, with finality, absolutely. This means, however, that Plato's view as he understood it, as it reveals itself to us if we enter sympathetically into his perspective, has been refuted: it has been seen to rest on untrue theoretical premises. So-called sympathetic understanding necessarily and legitimately ends when rational criticism reveals the untruth of the position which we are attempting to understand sympathetically; and the possibility of such rational criticism is necessarily admitted by relativism, since it claims to reject absolutism on rational grounds. The example of Plato is not an isolated one. Where in fact do we find, outside certain circles of present-day Western society, any value position which does not rest on theoretical premises of one kind or another—premises which claim to be simply, absolutely, universally true, and which as such are legitimately ex-

posed to rational criticism? I fear that the field within which relativists can practice sympathetic understanding is restricted to the community of relativists who understand each other with great sympathy because they are united by identically the same fundamental commitment, or rather by identically the same rational insight into the truth of relativism. What claims to be the final triumph over provincialism reveals itself as the most amazing manifestation of provincialism.

There is a remarkable contrast between the apparent humility and the hidden arrogance of relativism. The relativist rejects the absolutism inherent in our great Western tradition—in its belief in the possibility of a rational and universal ethics or of natural right—with indignation or contempt; and he accuses that tradition of provincialism. His heart goes out to the simple preliterate people who cherish their values without raising exorbitant claims on their behalf. But these simple people do not practice histrionic or sympathetic understanding. Lacking such understanding, they do not adopt their values in the only legitimate manner, that is, as supported by nothing except their commitment. They sometimes reject Western values. Therewith they engage in invalid criticism, for valid criticism presupposes histrionic understanding. They are then provincial and narrow, as provincial and narrow as Plato and the Bible. The only people who are not provincial and narrow are the Western relativists and their Westernized followers in other cultures. They alone are right.

It almost goes without saying that relativism, if it were acted upon, would lead to complete chaos. For to say in the same breath that our sole protection against war between societies and within society is reason, and that according to reason "those individuals and societies who find it congenial to their systems of values to oppress and subjugate others" are as right as those who love peace and justice, means to appeal to reason in the very act of destroying reason.

Many humanistic social scientists are aware of the inadequacy of relativism, but they hesitate to turn to what is called "absolutism." They may be said to adhere to a qualified relativism. Whether this qualified relativism has a solid basis appears to me to be the most pressing question for social science today.